

VIDEO

FAQ

Q I want to watch more football on Freeview. Will my hard disk recorder receive a subscription channel such as Setanta Sports?

A Subscription TV channels require a decoder card, which resembles a credit card. Some devices, such as the TUTV Anytime DTR, have a slot for such cards. You simply buy a subscription and slot the card into your hard disk recorder.

Other devices, including the Topfield TF5810PVRt, can't take such a card directly, but instead have slots that accept a Conditional Access Module (CAM). A CAM looks a lot like a CardBus laptop card. It slots into your hard disk recorder, and then the subscription card slots into the CAM (see the Hauppauge WinTV Setanta Sports review on page 27).

CAMs cost around £30 – an annoying extra charge for Freeview users because Setanta Sports and Top Up TV are the only subscription services available on Freeview.

Seth Barton

Displays and video expert

seth@computersshopper.co.uk

TOPFIELD TF5810PVRt

★★★★

£350 inc VAT
From www.turbosat.com



The TF5810PVRt is the first Freeview hard disk recorder we've seen with an HDMI output, although it also has SCART connectors, too. This may sound exciting, but we found the only benefit was HDMI's neater connector and more flexible cable.

When comparing the HDMI and SCART outputs, we couldn't detect any difference in picture quality. We tried upscaling the HDMI output to 720p and 1080i, but couldn't see any tangible benefits. Freeview uses MPEG2 compressed PAL (576i) video, and the TF5810PVRt did no better a job of scaling this to our TV's native resolution than the television did itself.

Fortunately, HDMI isn't the only selling point of this excellent hard disk recorder. For starters, it's more stylish than many we've seen previously. It's relatively slender and has a pleasingly simple black fascia. Behind this are two slots for adding Conditional Access Modules for subscription TV services (see FAQ, left, for more details).

As well as HDMI, the TF5810PVRt has all the outputs you'll need, with twin SCART sockets, S-video and an optical S/PDIF, among others. The remote is easy to use but, unusually, the channel and volume controls are arranged left to right, rather than up and down.

The menus are well designed and clearly presented. The electronic programme guide (EPG) shows all the programmes on the current channel, but annoyingly you have to press a button to see a timeline layout. This shows three hours of programming on four channels simultaneously, plus the current programme appears in a window. You can access the EPG while

timeshifting, enabling you to browse the schedule while your programme is paused.

Making recordings on the massive 500GB hard disk is easy. It will even offer to record entire series of shows, but only if the broadcaster has added this information. You can schedule two recordings at once, or timeshift one while recording another. You can even watch a programme while recording two others, as long as that channel belongs to one of the recorded multiplexes. For example, if you're recording on BBC1 and ITV1, you can simultaneously watch BBC2, Channel 4, BBC 3 or ITV3.

As soon as you switch channels, the TF5810PVRt will start caching video to the hard disk, so you can rewind back as far as the moment you switched. Unlike the Top Up TV DTR, you can't pause one channel, switch to another and then come back to find the first channel still paused. Timeshifting causes the hard disk to run constantly while you're watching, which draws extra power and makes unwanted noise.

However, the TF5810PVRt was very quiet, and we couldn't detect any drop in power usage when we disabled timeshifting.

Even with its huge hard disk, which should store around 300 hours of programmes, the TF5810PVRt is expensive. The Humax PVR-9200TB (*Labs, Shopper* 240), which is virtually identical, has no HDMI output and only a 160GB hard disk, but you can archive shows to a PC, and it costs just £200 including VAT.

Seth Barton

SUMMARY

- ✓ Huge hard disk
- ✓ Great interface
- ✗ Expensive

HARD DISK RECORDER 2x digital tuners, 500GB hard disk, 2x RF inputs, 2x RF outputs, HDMI, 2x SCART, S-video, composite, stereo phono and optical S/PDIF outputs, USB interface. Power consumption 22W on/14W standby
PART CODE TF5810PVR
DETAILS www.topfield.co.uk

Also consider...

TERRATEC Cinergy DT USB XS Diversity

★★★★★

£58 inc VAT
From www.pixmania.co.uk

COMPUTER SHOPPER
BEST BUY

This USB TV tuner has a diversity mode that takes a signal from two tuners and aerials to improve reception in areas with weak signal strength. Alternatively, you can use the tuners independently to receive one programme while recording another.

The included software is easy to use, image quality is good, and the remote control is clearly labelled.

Terratec's XS Diversity is the best dual tuner we've seen.



USB TV TUNER USB2 interface, dual digital tuners, 2x RF inputs
PART CODE 10456 DETAILS <http://uk.terratec.net> FULL REVIEW Apr 2007

TOP UP TV TUTV Anytime DTR

★★★★★

£90 (160GB) or
£130 (250GB) inc VAT
From www.topup.tv

COMPUTER SHOPPER
BEST BUY



This hard disk Freeview recorder has twin tuners, so you can watch one programme while recording another. Two models are currently available, with a choice of a 160GB or 250GB hard disk, storing around 100 and 150 hours of TV respectively.

As well as the usual Freeview broadcasts, you can choose to subscribe to Top Up TV programming or Setanta sports. It's a versatile and inexpensive way of improving your TV viewing.

HARD DISK RECORDER 2x digital tuners, 160GB hard disk, RF input, RF output, 2x SCART, S-video, composite, stereo phono and coaxial S/PDIF output PART CODE DT1 6300-16
DETAILS www.topuptv.com FULL REVIEW Jul 2007

TOSHIBA Camileo Pro

★★★★

£116 inc VAT

From www.lambda-tek.com/componentsshop

The Camileo Pro can be thought of as a digital Swiss army knife. It's a camcorder, camera, webcam, voice recorder, MP3 player, eBook reader and mass storage device. There's only 64MB of built-in memory, but you can easily add more using an SD or SDHC memory card.

Video is compressed using MPEG4; the best quality setting is a 640x480 resolution at a bit rate of 3.6Mbit/s. Unfortunately, we found the Camileo Pro slow to change exposure levels, and it tended to overexpose shots. The video compression also makes a mess of fast pans and is little better than the video modes on many digital cameras. The results are fine for use online, but viewing on a TV isn't recommended.

Photos are better, with a native image resolution of 3,072x2,304 thanks to the 7-megapixel CCD. However, our efforts often looked a little blurry and lacked the detail we'd expect from a digital camera at this price. There's no proper flash, just a weak LED light, which is also used by the camcorder in dim light. The

3x optical zoom is hardly generous for a camcorder and the 4x digital zoom cuts in without warning, causing a loss of image quality.

Voice recording works fine, storing intelligible dialogue. The MP3 player is easy to use, once you get the hang of the poorly labelled controls, and it sounds passable. However, we can't imagine reading an eBook of any length on the small 2½in display.



The Camileo is easy to set up as a webcam, thanks to the included mini-tripod. This has flexible legs and could come in handy when taking photos or filming. Also included are a set of headphones, a soft carrying pouch, AV and USB leads and a USB charger. Fully charged, the battery lasted for a respectable two hours and 11 minutes of continuous video recording.

Toshiba's Camileo Pro does more than other camcorders. However, you may find that your mobile phone and digital camera can already achieve most of its functions. If you primarily want a camcorder, hold off until you've read our Labs test of camcorders in next month's issue.

Seth Barton

SUMMARY

- ✓ Lots of features
- ✓ Inexpensive
- ✗ Poor-quality video

SDHC CAMCORDER SDHC storage (64MB internal), 3x optical zoom, 7-megapixel CCD, 2½in LCD screen, composite and mono outputs, USB2 interface
PART CODE PA3620E-1CAM
DETAILS www.toshiba.co.uk

PERFORMANCE (see page 66)



BT Vision V-box

★★★★

Free with 12-month BT Total Broadband contract

From www.bt.com

While BT's IPTV service isn't new, the company has now introduced a self-install option, which means you don't have to pay £60 and wait in for an engineer to do it for you.

To qualify for a free BT Vision V-box you need to sign up for BT Total Broadband and your line must support a speed of at least 2Mbit/s. Prices vary depending on the phone and internet packages you choose, but it can be as little as £8.95 including VAT for the first six months, reverting to £18 including VAT for the remaining 12 months of the contract. The only 'hidden' cost is a £30 connection fee.

Installation is more complex than a normal hard disk recorder, since you need to connect the V-box to your BT Home Hub (or other ADSL router). BT supplies a pair of 200Mbit/s powerline network adaptors for this, as well as SCART and RF cables to connect the V-box to your TV. Fortunately, the manuals are well written and easy to follow.

The first time you turn the unit on, it takes a few minutes to scan for channels. Once this is finished, you can watch Freeview programmes and on-demand shows. Since there are two tuners, you can record two shows at once while watching a previously recorded one.

The V-box uses the WinCE operating system and

Microsoft's IPTV software, which looks roughly the same as the TV portion of Media Center. This means it's the best-looking and easiest-to-use interface of any PVR we've seen. The EPG has information for the following 14 days, but this comes over your internet connection so is sometimes a little slow to appear. Searching for programmes is unmatched by any other PVR. You can search by genre, A-Z listings or keyword, which includes cast and directors, and the results show both Freeview and on-demand shows.

There's no contract, but you'll have to choose whether to pay for content as you watch or on a monthly basis. If you pay monthly, you'll need to choose which viewing packs to buy (at £6 each). However, we'd recommend the Value Pack for £14 per month. This lacks Setanta Sports, which costs £10 per month, but includes TV Replay, which lets you catch up with selected Channel 4 and BBC shows you've missed over the previous seven days. BBC shows are free, though, and can be accessed without buying a pack. You can find the full list of on-demand shows at www.btvision.bt.com.

Before you reach for your credit card and sign up for BT Vision, you should be aware of several major flaws that prevent us recommending it fully. Like the Virgin V-Box, there's no standby mode. This means that



pressing the remote's power button simply cuts the output to the SCART, HDMI and S-video interfaces and turns the front LED orange, but the internals – including the hard disk and fan – remain running as normal. You could turn it off at the mains when you're not watching, but this disables the RF passthrough, so your TV wouldn't receive a signal.

What's more, the box will power up again only if it can find a live internet connection. That means that, should your broadband connection go down when the V-box is off, you won't even be able to watch or record live TV.

Another gripe is that there's no support for surround sound in on-demand movies or television shows. Finally, the box doesn't upscale standard definition shows when using the HDMI output – you just see a high-definition menu system.

Fortunately, BT is already working on a new V-box, which should be launched next year. This should address most of these issues and – we're told – will add exciting new features such as the ability to control the menus simply by making hand gestures. For the moment, however, we'll have to settle for making rude gestures at the V-box.

Jim Martin

SUMMARY

- ✓ Great interface; good value
- ✗ High power consumption
- ✗ Requires internet connection

HARD DISK RECORDER 2x digital tuners, HDMI, S-video, 2x SCART, stereo phono, optical S/PDIF outputs, 3x USB2, 1x 10/100 Ethernet. Power consumption: 31W on/29W standby
PART CODE Vision V-box
DETAILS www.btvision.bt.com